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ABSTRACT

A college language instructor recounts his experience in a retraining program in business German at the West Germany's Goethe Institute. Twenty-eight individuals from the United States and from five European countries participated in a program that offered (1) a 14-day immersion into business-related German, (2) establishment of German business contacts, (3) discussions with European instructors of business German, (4) materials collection for courses to be offered at home, and (5) research on one topic of particular interest. Research was done in small groups. Visits to industrial and government firms, and seminar excursions in small and large groups were also included. The professional and personal rewards of participation were found to be substantial. (MSE)

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RETRAINING IN BUSINESS GERMAN THROUGH THE GOETHE INSTITUTE IN WEST GERMANY

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Retraining in Business German through the Goethe Institute in West Germany

Introduction:

The purpose of this paper is to alert college instructors of German to a unique opportunity to become more confident and knowledgeable in their teaching of Business German.

Most German instructors have probably found themselves in the same dilemma as I did when I began teaching a course in Business German. Not once during my Ph.D. training had I been given an assignment that dealt by the greatest stretch of imagination with something we might call "language for the professional". I can certainly not claim that my emphasis on baroque poetry prepared me for the task my department chairman handed to me a few years later, that is: start a program in Business German.

I was excited. My spirit of adventure sensed new challenges on a playground whose turf had been little used so far. The first obstacle had already been overcome: contrary to the experience of many of my colleagues at other institutions, my administration backed me up fully in my endeavours. I may add here that the administrators were eager to satisfy students' demands for such a course.

I was also scared. I certainly was aware of my lack of knowledge in the fields of economics, finance, management, or marketing. Some of this fear I overcame when I reminded myself that I was not about to teach German Business, but Business German - simply another branch of language. Some basic texts dealing with business-related matters proved that the new set of vocabulary was easily learned but the topics remained to be "Neuland". I managed fine during the first course, eagerly searching for background material of the chapters to be discussed the following week. The students' participation was livelier than in any of my other classes and their enthusiasm was the positive feedback that encouraged me to make the course even more interesting. Rather than being intimidated by the knowledge that my business students brought to class, I had them give presentations on the differing aspects of German and American business practices. Although the course went quite well, I could not help but feel uncomfortable because the subject I was teaching continued to be somewhat foreign to me, I never felt a personal relationship to my subject matter. Continued background reading provided me with an increasing amount of knowlede of the subject I was teaching but I new that before offering this course again, I had to do some "erleben" instead of "erlesen".

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Advertisement by the Goethe House:

The solution to my problem came when the Goethe House New York offered me a stipend for participation in a seminar on Business German in Düsseldorf, West Germany. There was an opportunity to personally experience some of the aspects that I taught about but the knowledge of which I had acquired solely through reading. The special attraction to this seminar lay in the advertized "active involvement of the participants". It turned out that the participants did indeed do most of the research work themselves.

The participants:

The 28 participants from 5 European countries plus the USA came with slightly different expectations. All hoped to gain some experience in business related fields that were still foggy in their minds - but each one had a different problem area. It may be safe to say, though, that everyone was looking forward to speaking "Business German" for two weeks, with experts in the field as well as with one another.

Arrangements:

Each participant had a private room in Schloß Nickeln, outside of Düsseldorf where most of the meals were eaten and where a few lectures and organisational meetings took place. The Goethe Institute paid for health insurance, lodging, breakfast, and one warm meal on all seminar days, bus fare to and from program sites as well as to and from those places which the participants chose individually for their respective research projects. In addition, everybody received 200,-DM to defray the cost of eating out. The air fare to and from Germany was not included.

The program:

The seminar program offered the participants the following:
1. A 14-day immersion into business related German
2. Establishing German business contacts
3. Discussions with European instructors of Business German
4. Collecting material for Business German Courses at home
5. Research on one topic of particular interest

Research:

The choice of research areas was left to the individual participants and included the following topics:
1. The changing Ruhrgebiet
2. Banks and the stock market
3. Employment policy
4. Economic policy
5. Workers' co-determination
6. Environmental protection
7. Marketing/advertising
8. Economic Journalism
9. Living and working conditions
10. Export strategies
11. Sources of energy
12. Business management

The participants split up into small research groups of 2-3 people and were given time in the morning or afternoon to pursue their work. The seminar leaders had prepared a list of contact persons for the various research areas who had previously consented to be available for interviews. Most research groups found additional sources of information. Whatever time was not taken up by research activities, was spent on visits to industrial and governmental firms and on excursions under the guidance of the seminar leaders.

Being connected with the Goethe Institut was an obvious advantage. All doors opened when we identified ourselves, and we gained access to enterprises which are generally not known for their open door policy. The hospitality ranged from sightseeing tours, interviews, and film demonstrations on the particular business to lunches and social evenings with dinner in the typical old Düsseldorf atmosphere.

The following institutions had a reception for us, either as a whole group or as one research unit:

1. Wirtschaftsministerium
2. Amt für Wirtschaftsförderung
3. Wirtschaftswoche
4. Wirtschaftsamt der Stadt Düsseldorf
5. Industrie- und Handelskammer
6. Handwerkskammer
7. Landesarbeitsamt
8. Hauptamt der Stadt Düsseldorf
9. Rathaus der Stadt Düsseldorf
10. Umweltbehörde der Stadt Düsseldorf
11. CDU, FDP, Die Günnen
12. Deutsche Bank
13. Krupp Steel
14. University of Düsseldorf (Dept. of Economic Journalism)
15. Berufliche Schulen
16. Amerikanisches Konsulat
17. Rheinische Post
18. Handelsblatt
19. Schlösser-Brauerei
20. Hannen-Brauerei
21. Westdeutsche Landesbank
22. Rheinisch-Westfälische Börse
23. Mitsubishi Bank
24. Fuji Bank

During the last few days of our seminar, each research group worked in the basement of Schloß Mickeln on oldfashioned manual typewriters to put together a paper which combined each participant's research activity into one coherent text. The photocopied product of these two weeks' activities was disrtibuted to all participants who could take it home and possibly use some of it in their courses.

Benefit:

Our photocopied research papers, the many pounds of advertisement and informative material were tangible evidence of our active involvement in this two week seminar. More valuable, however, were the excursions into the Ruhr district and accompaning visits to places to which a private visitor would not have access such as the half-day tour of Krupp Steel, the private reception and lunch at the casino of the Deutsche Bank, the hours of discussion with journalists of the Handelsblatt who not only had answers to our questions but could also discuss today's German language in the field of economic journalism.
We were in contact with those people who lived Business German, whose livelihood depended on the smooth running of their organization. Therefore, it is now with quite a different feeling that I discuss "banking" or "business management" or "co-determination" in my Business German courses - I have "erlebt" these topics.

When I now read articles in the "Wirtschaftswoche" oder "Handelsblatt", I re-live the Düsseldorf experience, feel the grandeur of the Deutsche Bank, remember the narrow mine shafts that produce the coal which is of vital importance to Germany's ecocomy, sense the enormeous heat radiating from the flowing steel just 3 m beneath me, remember the concerns expressed by the representatives of the Wirtschaftsministerium, and have anunderstanding for the incredibale amount of work each industrialized city is burdened with in order to keep its environment clean.

I also remember the evening hours when the participants got together in informal groups either to socialize, eat in quaint little Gasthäusern and drink the famous Düsseldorfer Alt Bier, or to take walks around Schloß Mickeln, exchanging views and ideas.

The above mentioned experience, coupled with the new international friendships that were formed resulted in an "Erlebnis" which has already proved beneficial to my teaching. Not only do I correspond and exchange materias with some newly found colleagues and business contacts in Düsseldorf, but I approach my Business German class now with a feeling of much more confidence, because I have seen it, I was there.

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Retraining through the Goethe Institute, Part II

(Evaluation of the results of a seminar offered by the Goethe-Institute for business language instructors.)

As we heard, the main objective of the seminar offered by the Goethe-Institute was active involvement of all participants. Participants were to interview representatives from business, government and political organizations and furnish reports about the information they had received. Two questions can be asked . First: Has this approach achieved the desired result, that is: Has it helped foreign language instructors to become better informed teachers of business language? Second: Is it a better approach than, for instance , offering two weeks of prepared lectures and field trips with subsequent discussions under the guidance of an expert in selected fields of German business?

The answer rests on an assessment of the current status of the teaching of business languages and the qualification of business language instructors. As yet, there are no clearly defined goals for either the contents of business language classes or the background and training of instructors of business language. If there were, one could quite successfully arrange a seminar with a predetermined schedule and expert speakers because one could expect a homogeneous group of participants who bring the same set of expectations to a seminar. However, with business language still a relatively new field of teaching, it seems that a seminar that provides the opportunity to the participants to

pursue their own interest at their own level of expertise is much preferable to a rigid schedule of topics, lectures and events that may be boring for one person or too demanding or too easy for others.

The structure of this seminar allowed each participant to either implement his own areas of interest and expertise according to his own plans, or investigate areas that were new and interesting to him. For many of us, as for me, the seminar offered both possibilities. Since I teach at an institution where a large number of graduates find careers in international banking and finance, banking topics and banking terms have always been treated extensively in our business language classes. Therefore, I joined the group that worked on the topic 'Banking and the Stock Market', in order to receive additional information and teaching materials. But also, in the course of visits, fields trips and interviews that were attended by the whole group I became more and more interested in environmental concerns, especially as they relate to business; this was a rather new area for me which I had never formally included in my teaching topics except in a very general way.

In order to limit the topic 'Banking and the Stock Market' to manageable proportions and allow for special interests of the group members, it was reduced to ' The Power of the German Banking Industry.' Since it was likely that the representatives of the large German commercial banks would not say anything that

one could not also find in annual reports or other bank-generated material, the group decided to include other interview sources besides those prepared by the moderators of the seminar. Thus we included an American brokerage firm , a Japanese bank subsidiary and a private German bank that had just been bought by a British bank. It was quite surprising that these interviews could be arranged at short notice; mentioning the name of the Goethe-Institute as the organization sponsoring our seminar seemed to open doors. The interviews were interesting to us and resulted in many detailed pieces of information that our group discussed and evaluated after the interviews.

The result for me from this segment of the seminar was a variety of new information and a large collection of brochures and other authentic materials that I can use in teaching and would not be able to find in any textbook.

The other benefit derived from the seminar was the creation of awareness for topics and facts that were new for the language instructor. As I mentioned, in my case these were facts concerning environmental issues. Although I had been aware of the general nature of the problem, --dying forests, poisoned rivers, polluted air and soil, dangerous waste products-- I had not realized to what extent damage to the environment and the costs of preventing or repairing the damage determine the course of business and dominate the public debate. In many excursions and interviews, environmental questions were a focal point, such as during a visit to Krupp, or in interviews at the Chamber of

Commerce in Düsseldorf or in the presentation by the administrator in charge of environmental protection for the city of Düsseldorf, or during question and answer periods with representatives from political parties. With great interest I also listened to the report of the seminar group that worked on environmental problems. The participants of this group interviewed representatives from various industries. The transcripts of the interviews showed the highly ambiguous attitude of German industry toward environmental protection. I learned how much environmental legislation had been passed and what a large bureaucracy at all levels of government had been created to solve environmental problems. I also learned how little effect the legislation and the bureaucratic efforts have had as yet.

As I became more interested in the issues, I collected more materials for my own use and for teaching purposes, mainly from the Federal Environmental Agency which is located in Berlin. I realized that 'environmental protection' lends itself very well as topic for a rather extensive teaching unit because it touches on many cultural, economic, political and business aspects. There is a great amount of books and brochures about environmental issues and the number of articles in business journals and newspapers that are related to environmental concerns is overwhelming. As a handout for those of you for which the topic may also be of interest, I have prepared an outline of environmental topics and concerns, a bibliography, a list of

useful addresses from which to request free materials, a short collection of newspaper and magazine articles and a translation of terms.

I hope that the description of my experiences with the retraining efforts of the Goethe-Institute have given you some insight into the scope of the program and its value for business language instructors.